



## **Famous Writers I Have Known: A Novel**

*James Magnuson*

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) 

# Famous Writers I Have Known: A Novel

*James Magnuson*

## **Famous Writers I Have Known: A Novel** James Magnuson

In this brilliant mix of literary satire and crime caper, Frankie Abandonato, a small-time con man on the run, finds refuge by posing as V. S. Mohle—a famously reclusive writer—and teaching in a prestigious writing program somewhere in Texas. Streetwise and semiliterate, Frankie finds that being treated as a genius agrees with him.

The program has been funded by Rex Schoeninger, the world's richest novelist, who is dying. Buzzards are circling, angling for the remains of Rex's fortune, and Frankie quickly realizes that he has been presented with the opportunity of a lifetime. Complicating matters is the fact that Rex is haunted by a twenty-five-year feud with the shadowy Mohle. What rankles Rex is that, while he has written fifty bestsellers and never gotten an ounce of literary respect, Mohle wrote one slender novel, disappeared into the woods, and become an icon. Determined to come to terms with his past, Rex has arranged to bring his rival to Texas, only to find himself facing off against an imposter.

*Famous Writers I Have Known* is not just an unforgettable literary romp but also a surprisingly tender take on two men—one a scam artist frantic to be believed, the other an old lion desperate to be remembered.

## **Famous Writers I Have Known: A Novel Details**

Date : Published January 12th 2015 by W. W. Norton Company (first published January 13th 2014)

ISBN : 9780393350814

Author : James Magnuson

Format : Paperback 320 pages

Genre : Fiction, Humor, Language, Writing, Funny, Contemporary

 [Download Famous Writers I Have Known: A Novel ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online Famous Writers I Have Known: A Novel ...pdf](#)

**Download and Read Free Online Famous Writers I Have Known: A Novel James Magnuson**

---

# From Reader Review Famous Writers I Have Known: A Novel for online ebook

## Al says

More often than not, funny premises don't result in consistently funny novels, but "Famous Writers I Have Known" is an exception. Author James Magnuson has a clever "what if"—what if a crook running from the New York mob is mistaken for a famous writing recluse (a la Salinger) when he departs a plane in Austin. A writer's institute welcomes him with open arms and puts up with his odd behavior since they are in awe of his "famous" company. Throw in a Micheneresque rival who is nursing a long grudge from a public fight on "The Dick Cavett Show," and you've got a very funny take on writer's workshops in academia: "Nowadays if you wanted to be an author, you didn't just go out and write a book, you needed a whole gang of people to show you how to do it." How long will the crook be able to maintain his ruse? Well, that's the tension throughout the book, as the faux author learns to fake his way through earnest critiques of student stories as well as receptions with the University's president: "Could I last a whole semester without someone seeing through me? It didn't seem likely, but for seventy-five grand, I could at least give it a try." And all along Magnuson, the director of an actual writer's center in Austin, has a field day satirizing academia, making "Famous Writers I Have Known" the funniest novel of its kind since Jane Smiley's "Moo." Recommended.

---

## Janet Flora Corso says

Writers, take a break and enjoy this satire all about our favorite topic. Completely ridiculous, fun, and, dare I say it, insightful :)

---

## Perry says

### A Magic Kingdom for MFAs

*But for non-MFAs:*

A novel recounting the *enervating, eccentric adventures* of various vainglorious *ivory-tower-types*, that seems mainly meant to amuse MFAs and comparably clever cognoscenti.\*^

\*Certainly, Professor Magnuson is a brilliant man and I presume he's a splendid teacher, literary expert and very nice, to boot.

^I mean no disrespect or offense to MFAs. I know a few. I like them. I'd love to have one myself [the degree that is].

---

## **Rita says**

I really enjoyed this book! It was quirky, funny, and had a little bit of suspense. Set in Austin, you get a little taste of the weirdness of the city while getting insight to the life of a popular writer. Also an easy and fast paced read!

---

## **Kathryn says**

This author packed similes into his novel like a hyperactive squirrel storing nuts for winter. Yes, I'm aware that was a weird and crap simile, but it makes my point.

I got this book because it was highly promoted, and because I'm a creative writing student and I like stories about con-artists. I thought this would be my ideal read.

It wasn't. The cardboard cut-out women and the very casual racism really began to bother me after a while. Author didn't bother to flesh out any characters other than the two main old white males, women are vapid, ditzy eye-candy, foreigners are exoticized or are servitor roles.

The story was okay, far-fetched, obviously, but they make sure to warn you about that in the beginning so you don't have the right to call him on how far-fetched it is... tricky but effective way of avoiding criticism. The story was meh, the writing was meh (intentionally, perhaps, because the narrator isn't supposed to be a writer), so the strongest point about it is how the narrator thinks: about women, about how he can screw over other people (which is his job) which tipped the scales from merely "meh" to "bleh." He's a non-character. He doesn't change throughout the novel. Yes, he feels emotion upon occasion, but that just makes him human, not protagonist or even an anti-hero.

Unimpressed, but I can see this being a suitable junk-food read for a certain audience that wouldn't be bothered by the things that irritated me. Normally I'd give it three stars, but I suppose my expectations of quality were raised because the author was a CW teacher.

---

## **Kasey says**

\*So\* much fun. Takes deadly aim at the bizarre world of academic creative writing programs, literary celebrity, post-modern imitative culture, and ... Texas.

But also--and I think this is a delicate and unusual balance--conveys a good-hearted belief in the power of storytelling, and in the power of narrative to carry our memories. I read this immediately after Susan Choi's *My Education*, also an academic satire, but of a hard, brittle, embittered kind. This book made me laugh louder and feel happier.

---

## **Shelia says**

This was not a book I might have normally chosen with my ultra-tight book budget.

Thanks to Goodreads, I got to step outside of my normal comfort zone and enjoy this recent-period fiction.

A man tells us the story of how he came to be where he is, shows us in the telling of it that he knows he's not The Good Guy, and lets us see how the events he describes have changed him.

Plain-old fiction isn't the section I browse most frequently, and first-person tales tend to put me off from the first page. This story, told in a straight-forward manner with few flashbacks, needled its way beyond that barrier and put some permanent cracks in it.

The main character makes no apologies for the fact that he's a petty criminal and a con man. During his latest con, he and his partner come into possession of a locker key belonging to a big mobster, and go on the run.

Things go awry right away, and the lead character ends up having to impersonate a famous & reclusive author in order to hide from the mobster's henchmen. The author goes from New York City, to Austin, Texas to teach a writing workshop to a small group of fellowship students for the summer. He's not an educated man, but he knows people, and he knows how to research and build a good con.

What he's completely unprepared for are his earnest and adoring students; the arrival of an old adversary of the writer whose place he's usurping; and the raging, summertime Texas heat.

He's surprised to find himself enjoying the teaching, and the big, fat checks make it even harder to walk away.

The story proceeds in several interesting, and not at all cliched directions before a surprisingly simple and satisfying conclusion.

---

## Chuck says

"Sometimes writing a sentence can be harder than serving one." Thus begins James Magnuson's comedy/satire about an academic creative writing program. And what does the academy have to do with serving a sentence? Well, protagonist-narrator Frankie Abandonato -- see the next paragraph for the likely source of his name -- is now taking a writing class in the pen after impersonating a reclusive author who made his living with one.

Thanks in part to higher education's tendency to operate on trust, Frankie's impersonation scheme proceeded successfully for quite awhile before eventually being unmasked. Although *Famous Writers I have Known* is a pretty funny book, Magnuson also adroitly explores a serious sub-theme: Just about anyone who has spent time teaching has at some point felt a bit fraudulent, so why not investigate how far a genuine fraud (How's that for an oxymoron?) can go in such an environment? If the resulting escapade seems far-fetched, which it assuredly is, keep in mind that Frank W. Abagnale (of *Catch Me If You Can* fame) and Ferdinand Waldo Demara (a/k/a "The Great Imposter") actually did pull off comparable stunts.

After a prolog and a chapter of stage-setting, Frankie, a high-school dropout whose favorite books include *The Swiss Family Robinson*, arrives at the Austin, Texas airport, having abruptly departed from New York City in the wake of a scam that produced threatening consequences. At the arrival gate in Austin, several

MFA students mistake him for V.S. Mohle, a famous writer who produced just one short legendary novel long ago before falling silent, but who has recently agreed to spend a semester in residence at the Fiction Institute of Texas. Sensing an opportunity unfolding, Frankie allows himself to be escorted to Mohle's quarters on campus. Mohle, it turns out, developed cold feet at the last minute, but word of his withdrawal failed to reach anyone at the Fiction Institute, so his position is now Frankie's for the taking (it helps that Frankie resembles an old photograph of Mohle, whom nobody has seen in years). Frankie, despite some initial qualms and a distinct lack of literary competence, quickly opts to stand in for Mohle's (the prospect of a \$75,000 paycheck plays no small role in his decision). He manages to teach his required seminar, mainly by having his students read from their own drafts and criticize each other's efforts, and he occasionally receives some tutorial guidance from Wayne Furlough, the Institute director, who is so giddy over having enticed "Mohle" to campus that he is blind to Frankie's failings. Frankie's teaching/mentoring turns out to be unexpectedly successful, and he even manages to navigate his way through a semi-private "author" reading of an excerpt from Mohle's acclaimed novel *Eat Your Wheaties*. To be sure, Frankie encounters a few difficult situations at times, but as an experienced con artist, he is adept at improvising and bluffing his way through them.

Adding flavor to the plot mix is another character, Rex Schoeninger, a hugely popular (and wealthy) octogenarian writer on the Institute's faculty who has won just about every literary prize imaginable. As Frankie soon learns, however, Rex and V.S. Mohle had a very nasty spat some twenty-five years earlier, one that included a physical altercation on the nationally televised Dick Cavett show. The two combatants have not seen each other since, but it now falls to Frankie/V.S. to meet with Rex and confront their longstanding enmity. As you might expect, Frankie earns high marks in this endeavor, and he is further inspired by dreams of securing a patronage from Schoeninger.

Magnuson's comedic romp milks the mistaken identity motif for all it's worth, yielding a lighthearted and humorous glimpse into academic foibles. It must have taken some effort to develop a consistent character-narrator who is so different from the distinguished academic author who currently directs the Michener Center for Writers at the University of Texas, but Magnuson manages it with seeming ease. And having met Magnuson at a reading that he gave in Austin, I can add that it's mighty refreshing to come across a real professor who possesses a down-to-earth sense of humor.

---

## Michelle Lancaster says

Fiction

Magnuson, James

Famous Writers I Have Known: A Novel

Read by Kevin T. Collins

Audible audio edition, 10 hours and 11 minutes, unabridged, \$4.99

Also available in hardcover (2014) and paperback (W. W. Norton, 978-0-393-35081-4, 320 pgs. \$15.95, January 2015)

Famous Writers I Have Known by James Magnuson, director of the James A. Michener Center for Writers at the University of Texas at Austin, is unequal parts noir, caper, and satirical sendup of creative writing programs and the contemporary literary scene, generally.

Frankie Abandonato is a career grifter in New York forced to flee after his latest con goes murderously awry.

The first flight out of La Guardia is to Austin and Frankie takes off. Landing in Austin, he's mistaken for V. S. Mohle (think J.D. Salinger), a famously reclusive author who has agreed to teach a writing workshop at a prestigious fiction program. Sensing the con of a lifetime, Frankie assumes the mantle of tortured genius and must ultimately confront Mohle's nemesis, Rex Schoeninger (think James Michener). The two writers haven't spoken since feuding over a Pulitzer came to blows on *The Dick Cavett Show*.

*Famous Authors I Have Known* rollicks with farce, especially when Frankie tries to bluff his way through literature workshops, where he mistakes Jay Gatsby for an author, is baffled by "some Cheever guy," finds himself on the phone with Günter Grass, and assigns exercises such as "Describe a field as seen by a cow. Do not mention the cow." Students make earnest declarations: "Realism is the atlas of fiction!" Magnuson's dialogue is smart, quick, and often hilarious. Here Frankie and his former partner, who have been in prison for most of the 1990s, discuss a newfangled scam involving African royalty and something called email:

"If you think I'm going to pose as a Nigerian prince, you're crazy."  
"Did I say you were going to have to pose as anybody? That's the beauty of it. It's all done on the computer. It's totally risk-free."  
"I'm not wearing any goddamned robes."

This novel is all plot as befits a crime caper. Magnuson is judicious with illustrative detail, not feeling the need to painstakingly draw every brick in the wall when a sketch will do for his purposes. The pace is brisk and even suspenseful as the story approaches its climax, holding attention effortlessly.

*Famous Authors I Have Known* is read by actor Kevin T. Collins, a veteran of audio narration whose work has won a couple of AudioFile Earphones Awards. Collins's voice is smooth and his pacing even. Frankie is a combination of cynical world-weariness, perpetual bemusement at the alien literary world he's landed in, and intermittent existential terror. Collins manages this mixture with aplomb, although a bit more attitude would be appropriate and his choice of where to place the emphasis in any particular phrase seemed off at times. Collins does a satisfying range of voices and accents, managing to make Texans sound like Texans, not caricatures.

Magnuson romps through the novel, lightheartedly skewering literary pretention, joining the perennial debate about what is art and what is popular. Is there more value in a single critically-acclaimed novel, or in a career of prosaic prose that "kept generations of readers reading?" Does it matter?

Originally published in *Lone Star Literary Life*.

---

### **Liz says**

A pleasing and well-shaped story about con artists, famous authors, literary programs, and mobster goons. The anti-hero is as lovable as the two escaped convicts who ran the beauty pageant in Happy, Texas. I'll definitely take a look at the author's other books.

---

### **Mary Hauer says**

So funny, very inventive. Glad my sister recommended it to me.

---

### **Tiffany Reisz says**

Nothing mind-blowing but very fun.

---

### **Julie says**

I really enjoyed this book, but I cannot for the life of me recall how I came across it. It's fairly light and breezy, maybe even in the summer trash category? Hero/narrator is a con man who, for complicated reasons, ends up posing as a very famous and reclusive author who is the guest teacher in a writing program. All sorts of vaguely identifiable events seem to form the background, and I'm sure for those more attuned to things in the literary world there are many I missed. It's just good fun.

---

### **Tracy says**

I wanted to really, really like this book. In the end it came down to the main character Frankie Abandonato - pun on the last name - I got it. I just couldn't connect with him. This was a satire about writers and MFA programs. It was the B (or A) story that felt like the real satire and "wink-wink". It was as if every cliché, plot device, stock character and literary device was used to get the reader from point a to z. Yes, a very fun read, but for me, satire usually has something bigger to say.

While I kept reading to see where Frankie would land - even though it opens up at the end - he never quite lands there. He is as superficial as the relationships he forces throughout the book. Is Magnuson saying that writer's are superficial and self-centered, and that there is no authenticity in the world of writer's and MFA programs? If so, pretty damn bleak.

Frankie went on a journey, but I don't think he arrived at any place in particular. It was as if he were an anti-character - and again, maybe this was the wink-wink satirical moment. This would definitely be a good book to use in an intro to creative writing MFA class.

---

### **Lisa Cobb Sabatini says**

I was delighted to have won Famous Writers I Have Known by James Magnuson from Goodreads. I confess to having mixed feelings about this book. I found the protagonist, Frankie, to be very likeable. Of course, as this is a first person narrative, the reader sees the world through his eyes. I enjoyed reading the scenes and meeting the characters, some of whom were very interesting, but I was easily distracted from reading, a rare occurrence for me. Especially in the middle of the book, I would stop reading in the midst of a scene. I can't recall the last time I read a book that, once I got to the point that only 100 pages of reading remained, I didn't keep reading to the end. I found the ending satisfying despite the fact that the growth and change in the protagonist, though significant, was small, and I realize that a great deal of character development was needed to reach that character change and story conclusion. There was so much that I liked about this book,



yet, for me, it was not a page turner. I like my main characters to learn hard lessons: lessons from which they grow and acquire tools that they use in the end to resolve their challenges. Frankie, a con man, does come to care about his mark, yet is he self aware and will this change have any impact upon him? The narrator, without intent, changes the lives of many of his victims in positive ways, yet he himself ultimately does not change. It is up to the reader to decide if that is a good thing.

---